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Statement submitted by International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

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Statement

Participation of people living in poverty

During the forty-eighth session of the Commission for Social Development, civil society organizations emphasized the fact that enhancing the participation of people living in poverty was of great importance in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In the years since the commitments of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the top-down approach has brought about economic growth, which only benefited a few members of society. The masses of people living in poverty, in particular women and girls, did not benefit during these years. The gap between the few who possess the world's wealth and those who live in extreme poverty has become deeper. We urgently need a process that will enhance a balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches towards development, peace, security and respecting human rights, with the goal of ensuring everyone a life of dignity.

"People-centred development" demands maximum participation of the citizens in the development agenda. People living in poverty feel powerless and alienated because they do not have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. They lack structures that provide opportunities to become active citizens so that they can exercise their rights and responsibilities. The electoral constituencies of the different levels in a representative democracy are so big that the people living in poverty have no forum for meaningful participation to enable their "small voices" to be heard. Effective and sustained participation can take place only when people are ensured a viable forum in which to have a say in the decision-making that affects their lives.

Some of the good practices of the participatory structures in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the participation law of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and in some states in India have demonstrated the effectiveness of greater participation of people in the development agenda. A common trait in these good practices is that the forums for participatory decision-making are at the neighbourhood level, enhancing opportunities for wider inclusion.

We recommend:

(a) Bringing forums for political, social and economic decision-making down to the grass-roots level by means of territorially inclusive neighbourhood forums of adults and children. It is imperative that such forums remain small-sized, face-to-face communities at every level so that the small voices of the marginalized and the weak do not get drowned out, lost or unheeded;

(b) Initiating a process for practical and inclusive citizenship training for adults and children with specific attention to women and girls, by organizing territorially responsive neighbourhood forums;

(c) Constantly reinforcing such territorially inclusive neighbourhood forums through a process of convergence, whereby whatever can be done is done through such forums;

(d) Accessing these forums to gather accurate disaggregated data;

(e) Ensuring that such neighbourhood forums are federated at various levels of governance for wider reach and impact;

(f) Utilizing the process of smaller neighbourhood groups and a federated structure to foster universal inclusion by upholding the value of maximum participation of vulnerable people;

(g) Partnering with non-governmental organizations to engage people living in poverty in participatory processes to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.